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OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

20 March 1962

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Reactions to Certain US Courses in Laos

1. The problem is to estimate certain reactions if the US, in order to put pressure on General Phoumi and Premier Boun Oun to cooperate in a coalition government, halted aid to the Laotian government and withdrew its MAAG teams.

2. If the US were to withdraw its training teams, military advisers and, most importantly, its logistics backup of the Laotian army, the Communist forces now in Laos (19,000 Pathet Lao and 9,000 North Vietnamese) would have the capability rapidly to defeat the Laotian government forces and to seize the major urban areas remaining in government hands. However, we do not believe that the Communists would immediately attempt to take over Laos by military means.

3. Those on the Communist side -- Moscow, Peiping, Hanoi, and the Pathet Lao -- want a Communist Laos. They would probably believe that their chances of success by political means were

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greatly enhanced by the US move. In these circumstances, all four would probably seek to pursue that objective primarily through political action rather than through military conquest. Moreover, the Soviets would wish to maintain the appearance of having negotiated in good faith for the creation of a coalition government. In any event, the Communist forces in Laos will continue to maintain military pressures on the government forces, and they will increase that pressure from time to time to improve their political leverage.

4. The assumed US course of action would have an immediate demoralizing effect upon the Laotian government and armed forces. The government could survive at most only three or four months without US financial support, and it is unlikely that Phoumi could hold the armed forces together for long. The Communist side would probably wait for the Laotian government to collapse or for Phoumi and Boun Oun to give in and accept Souvanna's terms for a coalition government.

5. Even if the US were to halt aid and withdraw the MAAG teams, we believe that the chances would be less than even that Boun Oun and Phoumi would agree to join a coalition government headed by Souvanna Phouma. They consider him to be a tool of the

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Communists, and they regard him with distaste and suspicion. If they were to give in and agree to participate in a Souvanna government we do not believe that they would do so with any serious intent of cooperating with Souvanna. Rather they would probably seek to undercut him and his followers as well as the Pathet Lao.

6. There would be at least four other courses open to Phoumi and Boun Oun, but it is impossible to estimate with confidence or precision the odds on any of them. The most likely of the four would appear to be to leave Laos in self-imposed exile. Both almost certainly have the means to do so, and they must at times become weary and discouraged with the struggle, as does Souvanna.

7. Their pride and determination, however, may not permit them to withdraw, and they might, unless fully convinced that the US and Thailand would not come to their aid, either move to Savannakhet with whatever government assets they could take with them and seek to bring about a partition of Laos, or initiate some desperate military action. In either of these cases there would be a sharp military reaction by the Communist forces, and Phoumi's troops would probably be defeated. It is also possible that Phoumi and Boun Oun might go into the hills with some of

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their loyal followers and seek to carry on a guerrilla war against any Laotian government which might be set up. However, neither would relish such a life and they probably could not command the following of many of the Laotian troops for long unless they were assured sources of maintenance and pay. Hence we believe this to be the least likely of the four courses.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Sherman Kent".

SHERMAN KENT
Chairman

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